



NEWS FROM NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

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NOAA HONORS IOWA CITY HEROES FOR SAVING LIVES DURING APRIL TORNADO

NOAA's National Weather Service has honored five community heroes for their life-saving actions during the devastating tornado that swept through Iowa City, Iowa, on April 13, 2006. In a ceremony today, NOAA presented Tom Hansen and Sue Faith of Johnson County Emergency Management Communications Dispatch, and Rev. Rudolph Juarez and Rev. Mr. Jerome Miller of St. Patrick's Catholic Church with the agency's StormReady Community Hero Award.

Lynn P. Maximuk, director of the National Weather Service Central Region, presented the awards at the St. Patrick's Parish Center, and said the actions of officials at Johnson County Communications Dispatch and St. Patrick's Catholic Church saved over 50 lives when the tornado hit. "Johnson County Emergency Management officials and dispatchers followed their procedures to perfection to relay advance warning of the approaching tornado," Maximuk said. "Pastor Rudolph Juarez and Deacon Jerome Miller took quick action to protect their parishioners. These people are the epitome of StormReady Community Heroes."

This event marks only the third time a StormReady Community Hero award has been presented by the National Weather Service.

When the strong F2 tornado swept through the heart of Iowa City, its random path of destruction included the Johnson County Sheriff's Office and St. Patrick's Catholic Church. Fortunately for town residents, Johnson County officials and other community leaders had worked with the Quad Cities National Weather Service office in Davenport to prepare for just such events by joining StormReady – a nationwide community preparedness program that helps community officials develop plans to handle all types of severe weather.

On April 13, 2006, National Weather Service forecasters issued the first tornado warning for Johnson County at 7:58 p.m. Just one minute later, following adopted procedure, local officials activated the Indoor Warning System created to relay National Weather Service warnings to occupants of buildings. Outdoor tornado sirens were activated at 8 p.m. The tornado warning was updated at 8:10 p.m. and 8:31 p.m. All updates were followed by activation of tornado warning sirens.

At 8:20 p.m., Deacon Miller was leaving St. Patrick's when he heard the tornado sirens. Deacon Miller immediately went back inside to notify Father Juarez, who was

conducting a Rosary service. The service was stopped immediately and over 50 parishioners took refuge in the basement of the next door rectory.

The tornado slammed into the church just minutes later at about 8:35 p.m., collapsing the steeple and southern portion of the roof, including the choir loft, directly onto where the parishioners had been moments before. The rectory building also sustained significant damage, but parishioners sheltering in the basement escaped unharmed.

“Advance planning led by Tom Hansen and Sue Faith at Johnson County Emergency Management and the quick reactions of Father Juarez and Deacon Miller saved dozens of people from serious injury or worse,” said Steve Kuhl, meteorologist in charge of the Quad Cities weather forecast office. “It is very encouraging to our staff to be able to congratulate them for their attention to detail rather than having to extend condolences to all those families.”

“NOAA feels a great compassion for the people of Iowa City who lost property to this destructive tornado,” Maximuk said. “At the same time, we must be grateful that due to the timely forecast and warnings from the National Weather Service and the prompt and heroic action of the emergency management community and others, the tragedy was not worse.

In 2007, NOAA, an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce, celebrates 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey by Thomas Jefferson in 1807 to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America’s scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

NOAA, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather- and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation’s coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, 61 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

On The Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA’s National Weather Service: <http://www.weather.gov>

NOAA Weather Radio All Hazards: <http://www.weather.gov/nwr>

NOAA’s StormReady program: <http://www.stormready.noaa.gov/>

NWS Quad Cities Weather Forecast Office: <http://weather.gov/quadcities>

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